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No State Religion in United Arab Constitution

(Damascus) - All religions are equal before the law, according to the new provisional constitution of the United Arab Republic. There is no stipulation for a state religion.

Previous constitutions of Egypt have stated that "Islam is the religion of the State", while Syrian constitutions of recent years do not mention a State religion but have provided that "the religion of the president of the Republic should be Islam".

The omission of any reference to Islam in the provisional constitution has been attributed to the insistence of leaders of the Syrian Socialist Renaissance Party, one of whom is a Christian.

Christians make up 16 per cent of Syria's four million population, and have been influential in both the economic and political life of the country. On the other hand, Egyptian Christians have reported difficulties in recent years in getting equal opportunities in government and economic circles. Christians in Egypt make up ten per cent of the population. E.P.S., Geneva

Waldensian Moderator Commends Italian Court

(St. Paul, Minnesota) - The "brave and courageous attitude" of the Italian court which convicted Bishop Pietro Fiordelli of Prato was praised by Dr. Achille Deodato, moderator of the Waldensian Church in Italy, now visiting the United States.

Dr. Deodato, speaking in St. Paul, Minnesota, said that the recent conviction of the Roman Catholic bishop on charges of defaming a couple married in a civil ceremony might have good consequences if it makes Italians aware that "pressure by the Vatican in civil affairs has gone too far".

Speaking of his own church, Pastor Deodato, who is also president of the Federal Council of Evangelical Churches of Italy, said that "we do not try to antagonize the Roman Catholic Church. We want to give Italy a positive presentation of the Gospel."

E.P.S., Geneva

US Protestants Urged to Take Political Responsibility

(Washington, D.C.) - Protestants are "neglecting their responsibility" for political action, and are often ineffective when they try to influence government decisions. That is the opinion of Dr. E. Clinton Gardner, professor of Christian ethics at Candler School of Theology at Emory University in Atlanta, Georgia.

Speaking to a four-day national conference on the Church and Political Order, sponsored by the Methodist Board of Temperance, Dr. Gardner called for a "careful examination of the meaning of separation of Church and State" to find ways in which "religious forces may cooperate across church and even faith lines in the effort to achieve common goals and ends".

Criticising what he called the "widespread tendency to regard politics as a dirty business", Dr. Gardner said that what is needed "is not cynicism and self-righteous withdrawal by Christians, but more concern and participation in political life by those church members and others who deplore the existing corruption".

E.P.S., Geneva

Britain, New Zealand Send Aid for Indonesia

(Geneva) - Churches in New Zealand and the United Kingdom have responded to an appeal to aid Christians in Indonesia.

A total of \$2,100 from New Zealand and \$2,800 from the United Kingdom have been received in the office of the Division of Inter-Church Aid and Service to Refugees of the World Council of Churches on March 24, following an appeal issued on March 18 asking for \$40,000 to buy rice and other goods and \$10,000 for the purchase of drugs for Indonesian Christian hospitals.

The appeal was the result of a meeting in Singapore of representatives of the East Asia Christian Conference, the National Council of Churches in Indonesia, the Malayan Christian Council and Church World Service, relief agency of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA.

E.P.S., Geneva

Controversy Looms for All-German Synod Meeting

(Berlin) - A controversial session is shaping up for the April 26 to 30 meeting of the All-German Synod of the Evangelical Church in Germany.

The synod, which meets annually and includes churches from both East and West Germany, will hold its sessions in both the eastern and western sections of Berlin, and will discuss "The Church and Education", a subject that will include consideration of the whole question of confirmation and youth rites.

At the same time, a controversy regarding a stand on atomic warfare has developed between two groups within the church. A group of German Christians around the "Church Brotherhoods", made up of pastors and laymen who led the church's fight against Hitler, has urged the synod to take a stand against nuclear armament and atomic warfare (see EPS No. 11).

In replying to the demand, Provost Hans Asmussen, a retired prominent official of the EKD, has warned against oversimplifying the issues involved and "giving the impression that all that is needed to save us from atomic warfare is for Christians in Western Germany to start an atomic strike".

People who consider a protest movement against nuclear weapons more important than the care of young people through baptism, religious instruction and confirmation, he said, evidently regard "the body as more important than the soul, politics as more important than the Church, survival as more important than life in accordance with the word of God. People who are more afraid of atomic weapons than of the death of the soul have already betrayed every article of the Christian faith."

Provost Asmussen said that the groups asking the synod to express its agreement or disagreement on a set of ten basic principles did not mention the fact that "the first thing we must do as representatives of the Church is to be called to repentance and prayer". E.P.S., Geneva

Bishop Reeves Distressed at Banning of Anglican Priest

(Johannesburg) - The Rt. Rev. Ambrose Reeves, the Anglican Bishop of Johannesburg, is "greatly distressed" because the Rev. Charles Hooper, an Anglican priest, has been forbidden to enter the African reserves around Zeerust.

"While Mr. Hooper has been hampered in his work for some time," Bishop Reeves said, "this has taken place for no other reason than that he has exercised faithfully that Christian compassion which any minister of the Gospel ought to show in the kind of critical situation in which the Church has found itself in the Zeerust area during these last months. But far more serious ... is the fact that many hundreds of our faithful church people have suddenly been deprived of the ministry of the Word and Sacraments."

Mr. Hooper was banned from the reserves by Dr. H.F. Verwoerd, the Minister of Native Affairs. E.P.S., Geneva

Documentary Film Reviews Russian Church Developments

(Moscow) - A forty-minute documentary film, "High Service", reviewing developments within the Russian Orthodox Church, has been completed in Moscow. Dedicated to Patriarch Alexei of Moscow, the film records visits paid to Russia in recent years by church leaders, including the Anglican Archbishop of York and leaders of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA.

The film largely covers events during and after World War II, and depicts church ceremonies in Moscow, Leningrad and Pskov, one of the oldest centres of Russian Orthodoxy. Also shown are activities in monasteries, seminaries and theological academies. E.P.S., Geneva

UK Free Churches Not Ready for Unity. Survey Shows

(Folkestone, England) - A majority of Free Church councils in the United Kingdom do not think the "time is ripe" for organic unity between the Free Churches in the country, according to survey results announced late this month at the annual meeting of the Free Church Federal Council in Folkestone, England.

Commenting on the survey, Dr. Hugh Martin, a leading Baptist and former council moderator, said that apparently the Free Churches, by their refusal to join together, were going to fail "to deal with the movement of great masses of the population into new areas and new towns where we are not meeting the situation and cannot meet it in denominational terms".

Dr. Ernest A. Payne, the moderator of the Federal Council, made a plea for further experiments with union churches officially linked to more than one denomination.

Earlier, Dr. Geoffrey F. Fisher, Archbishop of Canterbury, had asked that the Church of England be "let in on" any theological discussions between the Free Churches.

"If you are having theological discussions," he said, "it is a jolly good thing to do, but could we not be let in in some way by the back door as observers or under the table, because we want to know what you think for our own advantage? The basis of the whole ecumenical movement is that we talk with as many members of the family as possible, and what I am trying to establish is that in this country the Free Churches and the Church of England are of the same family and nothing else at all."

The council asked its executive group "as a matter of urgency to consider the nature of the next steps to be taken in promoting the closer relations of the Free Churches".

The council drew attention to "the growing demand that Britain should give a lead to the world by declaring her willingness to suspend immediately the manufacture and testing of her own nuclear weapons by foregoing the building of missile bases in these islands and by grounding H-bomb aircraft".

In other action the council asked the British Council of Churches to name a committee to examine the religious and social aspects of artificial insemination.

E.P.S., Geneva

YMCA Joins in Counsellor Exchange Programme

(Geneva) - The World Alliance of YMCAs reports that its World Y Educational Travel organisation is receiving applications from students, teachers and social workers for its 1958 programme, which includes three months in the United States as camp counsellors.

The programme, begun four years ago by the Association for World Travel Exchange, provides opportunities for qualified young people to visit the United States, and introduces an international emphasis into camp life. The programme is now sponsored by voluntary and governmental agencies.

During 1957, 129 counsellors from sixteen countries of Europe, the Middle East, Africa and Asia took part.

E.P.S., Geneva

Bishop May Speaks on Austrian Concordat Negotiations with Vatican

(Vienna) - In a speech this month looking at the changes in the Austrian Protestant churches since 1945, Bishop Gerhard May has expressed the fear that the existing good relations between State and Church and between Roman Catholics and Protestants in Austria will break down under the "bewildering change in the negotiations for a concordat". A recent note from the Vatican to the Austrian government has refused to negotiate a new concordat for the country (see EPS No. 7).

Bishop May of the Protestant Church in Austria has pointed out that the demands of the Vatican are particularly dangerous to Protestant education. Under the concordat, set up in 1934 and still legally valid, the Roman Catholic Church has the right to build schools with a state subsidy, Bishop May said, and added that the concordat expressly declares that this project is intended "to provide a basis for the development of official Catholic state schools".

This would, Bishop May said, undermine all that has been achieved in Protestant education during the last ninety years, and surrender the majority of the 62,000 Protestant school children entirely to Catholic influence. "That must never happen," he said.

Because of the current political situation, Bishop May said it was his opinion that it would prove impossible to meet the demands of the Vatican, but, he warned, Protestants must keep constantly on the alert because Rome has "tremendous staying power".

E.P.S., Geneva

In Brief

Dr. Abbe L. Warnhuis, 81, retired minister of the Reformed Church in America and well-known church leader, died on March 17 at Bronxville, New York. Dr. Warnhuis was secretary of the International Missionary Council for more than twenty years, serving in New York, London and the Far East. Later he was vice-president of Church World Service, the relief agency of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA.

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Dr. August Bach, East German government official, has been named to succeed the late Dr. Otto Nuschke as president of the Christian Democratic Union in the German Democratic Republic. Speaking at a recent party meeting at Halle, Germany, the new president said that recognition of the DDR and rejection of the treaty concerning spiritual care in the armed forces "are and will remain" the crucial tests which show the attitude of the Evangelical Church toward workers and farmers.

* *

Spanish Protestants held prayer services this month throughout the country, asking for a solution to the "grave problem" involving the marriage of non-Catholics in civil ceremonies. Present laws provide that non-Catholics may be legally married in Spain in a civil ceremony, but the General Office of Registry of the Spanish government says that "conversion to Protestantism is not in itself proof of non-Catholicism". Protestant church officials point out that many Protestant young people want to marry but cannot in the face of the present laws.

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Thirty-two business and professional men, members of the Assemblies of God, made a ten-day tour this month of their denomination's missionary work in Central America, travelling in eight privately owned planes.

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Plans are under way to make Spanish translations of Billy Graham's weekly radio programme, "The Hour of Decision". Mr. Graham has just finished an evangelistic campaign in the Caribbean and in Central America, where he addressed 400,000 persons. A total of about 20,700 "decisions for Christ" were recorded.

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Bishop Jacinthe Demetrius Gad has been named by Pope Pius XII as Titular Bishop of Gratianopolis and Apostolic Exarch for Byzantine Rite Catholics in Greece. The appointment was made after the faculty of the Greek Orthodox Theological School at the University of Athens had sent a letter to the Pope asking him not to name a successor to Bishop George Calavassy, who held the post until his death last November. The Orthodox faculty said that the presence of Eastern Rite Catholics in Greece disrupts the unity of the Greek people and hurts relations between the Eastern Orthodox and Roman Catholic churches.

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The next German Evangelical Kirchentag is to be held in Munich from August 12 to 16, 1959.

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After months of negotiation, the Church of South Mahratta, in the north of Mysore Province, has decided to join the Church of South India. It was originally founded by the Basel Mission and has about 7,000 members. Its affiliation to the Church of South India will be officially celebrated at Whitsunday, May 25.

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The theological faculty of Utrecht has invited Professor L.J. Pap of Budapest to Utrecht to continue his research work. He is a former student of the theological faculty there.

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The authorities of the German Democratic Republic (DDR) have refused to grant entrance visas to eighteen Protestant pastors and laymen from Westphalia, who wished to visit congregations in the Cottbus district. The proposed visit was in connection with an inter-church visiting programme arranged by the Church of Westphalia and the churches in Cottbus.

E.P.S., Geneva